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AUTHOR Valentine, Marianne
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ABSTRACT

Noting that the approach to early childhood education from the northern Italian town of Reggio Emilia has become renowned worldwide, this report explains the approach and explores the possible translation or adaptation of aspects of this pedagogical approach to Scotland. Following an introduction, the report is presented in three parts. Part 1 provides information on the organization of the system of preschools and infant-toddler centers in Reggio Emilia and compares it to the British system. Part 2 describes the Reggio Emilia approach, focusing on the image of the child; the role of expressive arts in preschool; "progettazione" (loosely, the relationship between teacher and child), including the teacher's role in documenting learning; community and parent-school relationships; the educational environment; and teachers as learners. Part 3 discusses how the Scottish early years education system might adapt parts of the Reggio Emilia approach for its use. This part begins with reflections on current practice in Scotland and then discusses how the following issues integral to the Reggio approach are of particular interest to the Scottish system: physical features of the school environment, the use of time, collaboration, partnerships with parents, curriculum, the role of the adult, documentation, and initial teacher training and professional development. This part also delineates questions for reflection by early childhood professionals. Includes a 26-item bibliography. (KB)

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The Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Years Education

Marianne Valentine

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BACKGROUND

In educational terms the northern Italian town of Reggio Emilia has become renowned worldwide for its forward thinking and exemplary approach to early childhood education. North American educators have long recognised the importance of the continuing educational development that is taking place in the Reggio model, and there is much about the approach that is of interest to educators in Scotland. This is a socio-constructivist model. That is, it is influenced by the theory of Lev Vygotsky, which states that children (and adults) co-construct their theories and knowledge through the relationships that they build with other people and the surrounding environment. It also draws on the work of others such as Piaget, Howard Gardner and Jerome Bruner. It promotes an image of the child as a capable participator in his own learning. It is a model where the expressive arts play a central role in learning, where a unique reciprocal relationship of learning exists between teacher and child, and where much attention is given to detailed observation and documentation of learning. It is a model that demonstrates a strong relationship between school and community and provides a remarkable programme for professional development.

The town of Reggio Emilia is situated in the heart of Italy's Emilia–Romagna region and had a population of 420,431[1] recorded in the 1991 census. It is a very prosperous town that boasts a strong cultural heritage, historic architecture and beautiful squares. The citizens of Reggio Emilia are served by generally efficient public services. The town has a strong tradition of cooperation and inclusion that cuts across social and economic boundaries, and politically the people continue to show their support for the Socialist Parties. Local government is committed to the development of social policies that actively support families and children.

The education that the Reggio schools provide is the result of a long and gradual process that continues to evolve. We must look back to the period immediately after the Second World War to understand the genesis of what has become known as the 'Reggio Approach'. Two factors can be seen to have had a fundamental and far-reaching effect.

- It was the parents and citizens of Reggio Emilia who, in a show of collective responsibility and the desire to create a better society for their children, occupied a disused building that they turned into the first nursery school. This and the other schools that followed were quite literally built by the people.
- The effort and will of the parents was given direction through the extraordinary vision of Loris Malaguzzi, at the time a young teacher, who dedicated his life to the development of the philosophy now known as the Reggio Approach.

In 1963 the local council or Municipality opened the first Municipal nursery schools for children of three to six years and in 1970 these were joined by the first infant–toddler centres for infants from three months to three years. In the late 1960s the original schools founded in the post-war period were integrated into the Municipal system and given renewed impetus.

[1] All figures in this section are extracted from *Municipal Infant–Toddler Centres and Pre-schools of Reggio Emilia*, Reggio Children, 1996.

From the start the Municipal-run schools have been committed to progressive thinking and the advancement of an educational project that centres on the child. For these reasons the Reggio schools have attracted significant global interest and received international accolades.

Foreign interest originally began in the 1970s with the creation of a touring exhibition of the work taking place in the schools. The exhibition was originally called *The Eye Jumps over the Wall* and is now known as *The Hundred Languages of Children*. It has been shown throughout the world and continues to evolve. The number of people worldwide who visit the schools and attend the conferences organised by the private organisation called Reggio Children continues to increase. Reggio Children was founded in 1995 in response to the level of global interest in Reggio and has as its full title The Centre for the Promotion and Defence of the Rights of Children. It aims to share its expertise both nationally and internationally and promote research in the field.

As a result of exemplary work being done, a number of awards have been bestowed on the schools and the people involved:

- in 1992, the late Loris Malaguzzi, the founder of the philosophy, was awarded the Danish LEGO Prize for his outstanding work in the field of early childhood education
- in 1993, Reggio schools were given an award from the Kohl Foundation in Chicago
- in 1994, the Hans Christian Andersen Prize was awarded to the schools in recognition of their work.

In 1995 two important events took place. Dr Jerome S. Bruner visited the schools and was so deeply impressed by the experience that he established a relationship with the schools based on promoting and improving educational systems globally. A link between Reggio and the Italian Ministry of Education was also established with the aim of creating a common programme of professional development throughout the country.

GENERAL INFORMATION

There are today 19[1] Municipal pre-schools in Reggio Emilia and 13 infant–toddler centres. There are also three infant–toddler centres run by cooperatives and one managed by a parents' association. These have strong links with the Municipal system and are closely involved in the development of the Reggio Approach. The Municipal schools work alongside the state and private schools to provide education for 95 per cent of the town's 3–6 year olds and 35 per cent of the children from three months to three years. While the parents' financial contribution is means-tested, the local government commits 12 per cent of its entire budget to supporting the schools – more than any other Italian local government.

This is therefore very much a community-based project. The head administrator for the schools reports directly to the town council and works closely with a group of curriculum team leaders or advisers, each of whom is known as a *pedagogista* and coordinates the teaching in a group of schools and centres. In terms of staffing, each school comprises two teachers per classroom, one *atelierista* (a specialist arts teacher who works closely with teachers on all areas of learning, teaching and documentation) and several auxiliary staff – such as cooks and cleaners – who are all equally valued as playing fundamental roles in the life of the school. There is no principal of the school and no structure of promoted staff structure. Teachers work in pairs and remain with the same group of children for the three-year period, developing a strong sense of community.

The organisation of the schools is as follows. Teaching staff work a total of 36 hours per week, of which 30 hours are spent with the children. The remaining six hours are used for a variety of purposes that include professional development, planning, preparation of materials and meetings with families. Teachers work on a shift system that rotates weekly. The schools are open from 8.00 a.m. until 4.00 p.m. daily with the option of a 7.30 a.m. start and an extended day until 6.20 p.m. for those families who file a special request. As well as two full-time teachers in each section there is also a part-time teacher who covers the extended day and works from 3.30 p.m. until 6.30 p.m. Teachers always work in pairs and each pair of teachers (co-teachers) is responsible for a maximum of 24 children at nursery school level.

The Reggio education system is quite different from the British system in that it does not consider early years education and child care to be separate issues. Instead nursery education is seen to be multi-functional, providing high-quality education and childcare for the children of people who work. Most educational activities take place in the morning. Children have lunch together and then spend part of the afternoon asleep. As no hierarchy exists within the school staff, teachers are involved in all aspects of the daily routine including meal times and bed times; emphasising the ethos of collectivity and participation that pervades all areas of school life.

[1] All figures in this section are extracted from *Municipal Infant–Toddler Centres and Pre-schools of Reggio Emilia*, Reggio Children, 1996.

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WHAT IS 'THE REGGIO APPROACH'?

The following factors are inherent in the Reggio Approach:

- the image of the child
- the expressive arts in the pre-school
- *progettazione*
- community and parent–school relationships
- environment
- teachers as learners.

Each of these will be considered separately although they are generally interrelated.

The Image of the Child

> *Our image of children no longer considers them as isolated and egocentric, does not only see them as engaged in action with objects, does not emphasise only the cognitive aspects, does not belittle feelings or what is not logical and does not consider with ambiguity the role of the reflective domain. Instead our image of the child is rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent and most of all connected to adults and children.*
>
> Loris Malaguzzi[3]

All that takes place within the Reggio schools in terms of learning and teaching, building relationships and professional development stems from one overriding factor – the image of the child. Rather than seeing the child as an empty vessel waiting eagerly to be filled with knowledge, Reggio educators believe strongly in a child with unlimited potential who is eager to interact with and contribute to the world. They believe in a child who has a fundamental right to 'realise and expand their potential'. This is a child who is driven by curiosity and imagination, a capable child who delights in taking responsibility for his own learning, a child who listens and is listened to, a child with an enormous need to love and to be loved, a child who is *valued*. This is highlighted in the creation of a 'Charter of Rights', a manifesto of the rights of parents and teachers as well as children, which is evident in every school. It states that:

> *Children have the right to be recognised as subjects of individual, legal, civil, and social rights; as both source and constructors of their own experience, and thus active participants in the organisation of their identities, abilities, and autonomy, through relationships and interaction with their peers, with adults, with ideas, with objects and with the real and imaginary events of intercommunicating worlds.*[4]

Unlike other pedagogies that can be guilty of treating early infancy as a preparation for later childhood and adulthood, and consequently seeing nursery education as a kind of antechamber to later stages of formal education, the Reggio Approach considers early

[3] Malaguzzi, L., quoted in Penn, H., *Comparing Nurseries: Staff and Children in Italy, Spain and the UK*, Paul Chapman Publishing, 1997, p. 117.

[4] *A Journey into the Rights of Children*, *The Unheard Voice of Children* series, Reggio Children, 1996.

infancy to be a distinct developmental phase in which children demonstrate an extraordinary curiosity about the world. Indeed, the name of the schools, *scuole dell'infanzia*, does not have the connotations of 'preparation' and 'pre-ness' inherent in the Anglo-American term 'pre-school'.

This image of the child has fundamental and far-reaching effect on the learning and teaching that takes place in the schools.

The Expressive Arts in the Pre-school: 'The Hundred Languages'

The child
is made of one hundred.
The child has
a hundred languages
a hundred hands
a hundred thoughts
a hundred ways of thinking
of playing, of speaking ...

Loris Malaguzzi[5]

One of the most revolutionary elements within the Reggio Approach is the central importance given to the expressive arts as a vehicle for learning. Detailed drawing activities are a daily occurrence in the schools and the outstanding standard of work produced by the children has become widely acknowledged. Children are also encouraged to participate in a variety of expressive activities such as sculpture, dramatic play, shadow play, puppetry, painting, dancing, music, ceramics, construction, writing. The plethora of resources in the schools' central atelier and the mini atelier in each classroom as well as the presence of a full-time *atelierista* in each pre-school is testimony to the importance placed on this area of child development.

Certain topics such as 'light and dark' recur as stimuli for children's learning, and teachers and children have a wide variety of material and resources at their disposal. For such a theme children may be given the opportunity to explore the effects of light and shadow using torches and light tables. They may have the opportunity to draw with light by making holes into black card that is lit from behind, they may be given the opportunity to create shadow stories using objects on an overhead projector, stories in which they themselves can physically become a part.

Why stress the expressive arts over literacy and numeracy?

Consistent with the work on *multiple intelligences*,[6] by American psychologist Howard Gardner, educators in Reggio Emilia are fully aware of the importance of developing all areas of learning and understanding, not only the logical and linguistic. While literacy and

[5] For a full reading of the poem see: *The Hundred Languages of Children*, Catalogue of the Exhibition, Reggio Children, 1996.

[6] Gardner, H., *Frames of Mind, The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, NY, Basic Books, 1983.

numeracy activities undoubtedly have their place in the daily activities of the pre-schools, teachers believe strongly in the central role that the expressive arts have to play, for many reasons.

- They acknowledge the fact that very young children are extremely expressive, with an enormous capacity for sharing feelings and emotion, and that imagination plays a key role in the child's search for knowledge and understanding.
- They are convinced of the overriding importance of the learning *process* rather than the final product. Involvement in the expressive arts allows the children to revisit subjects of interest over and over through many different media to gain multiple perspectives and a higher level of understanding.
- They are aware that, by concentrating too much on the development of the child's verbal and literary skills, teachers can covertly devalue the child's skilled use of their many non-verbal languages (Malaguzzi talked of a hundred and a hundred more). The child's capacity to communicate through gestures, glances, emotion, dance, music, sculpture, painting, story telling, scribed stories and many more is therefore greatly valued, and teachers strive to develop these in the child.
- They believe strongly that the expressive arts can give children the opportunity to look at and experience their world in many different ways. The children are encouraged to use all their senses to seek a greater understanding; through observation, analysis and piecing together what they experience, they dismantle and reassemble the original, creating a new and individual whole. Synaesthetic activities (such as encouraging children to make pictorial representations of smells or noises for example) are a dominant feature and seek to give children a fuller understanding of the world. As Vea Vecchi, *atelierista* at the Diana pre-school, states 'it is through the process of transformation that we become closer to the very essence of life'.[7]

Progettazione

> *This is not a free journey but neither is it a journey with rigid timetables and schedules; rather it is akin to journey guided by a compass.*
>
> Carlina Rinaldi[8]

Notoriously difficult to translate, the term *progettazione* is often understood to mean emergent curriculum or child-centred curriculum, but the reality is far more complex. Reggio educators talk of working without a teacher-led curriculum but this does not mean that planning and preparation do not take place. Rather, teachers learn to observe children closely, listen to them carefully and give value to their own ideas so that they might gain an understanding of what interests children most and create strategies that allow the children to build upon their interests. Topics for study can come from the children themselves, from subjects that the teacher knows naturally

[7] Vecchi, V., 'Children's Expressive Languages', lecture given at International Winter Institute, Reggio Emilia, January 1999.

[8] Rinaldi, C., 'The Pedagogy of Listening', lecture given at International Winter Institute, Reggio Emilia, January 1998.

interest children and also from the family and the greater community. Projects do not follow rigid timetables but rather meander slowly at the pace of the children. Children may be involved in a specific project over a lengthy period of time but not every day, rather they return to it as their interests dictate, revisiting and re-evaluating what they learn.

Children are the *protagonists* of their learning and are encouraged by teachers to develop projects and solve problems among themselves, using the teacher as a tool who can 'lend' help, information and experience when necessary. Central to this mode of learning and teaching is the development of reciprocal relationships of love and trust between adult and child and between the children themselves. Learning always takes place within a group setting because Reggio educators see interaction and the consideration of differing points of view to be fundamental to the learning process.

The building of such relationships and indeed the development of such projects that can continue for days, weeks and sometimes the school year, takes a great amount of time and cannot be constrained by school timetables or specialist curricular lessons. Time, and how it is conceived, is therefore an important factor. Within the nurseries, learning and teaching take place always at the pace of the child.

What is the role of the teacher in this type of learning process?

The role of the teacher in the learning–teaching relationship known as *progettazione* can be summarised as follows.

- The teacher seeks to know each child as an individual person and to create a trusting relationship in which learning can take place.
- The teacher strives to support and encourage the child on the learning journey, encouraging them to reflect and to question. In this sense, the role of the teacher is not to dispense information or simply to correct. Rather the teacher is like a tool that the children use when most needed. Sometimes they may simply observe, at other moments they act as co-investigators or scribes. They may challenge or provoke ideas through the use of open-ended questions.
- There is an enormous respect for children's own theories and hypotheses. Allowing children to make mistakes in their quest to solve problems is considered fundamental to the learning process. Teachers are not quick to intervene at every problem the children confront. Indeed, allowing children to travel along what the adult may consider 'the wrong path' and encouraging the children to realise this autonomously is considered an important, if controversial, learning strategy. Through close observation and evaluation of evidence the teacher learns to judge when intervention is most appropriate. It is only when time is taken to build a close and trusting relationship with the children that the teacher can become confident in this role. This remains one of the principal reasons for teachers and children remaining together for the three-year duration.
- The teacher must *observe* the child's learning process as closely as possible. By observing, the teacher enters into a relationship with the child. Reggio educators spend a huge amount of time observing children working in small groups in an attempt to come closer to the children's understanding. The process of observation

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is considered partial and subjective, hence the need to observe and re-observe and to consider varying points of view.

- Fundamental to the teacher's role is the *documentation* of the child's learning process. Documentation, in terms of photographic and written wall panels placed at both adult and child height, is a prominent feature of the schools and centres. However, when teachers talk of creating documentation they mean something much more complex. Carlina Rinaldi offers the following explanation:

> *Documentation means to produce traces of an observation.*
> *Documentation makes visible*
> *Documentation is for children, teachers, parents, society.*
> *Documentation can give an image of the child ...*[9]

And again,

> *Documentation is a way of entering the dark zone; of understanding how we learn.*
> *Documentation helps us to share the responsibility of teaching.*[10]

- Because teachers at Reggio believe strongly in the partiality of any given opinion and therefore in the necessity to share and discuss differing points of view, they use a variety of means for the creation of documentation including audio and video recordings, photographs, drawings and written notes. These are always transcribed, listened to again and again and shared with the co-teacher and indeed all the school teaching staff.
- It is through sharing and discussing documentation that teachers feel most able to interpret and evaluate the learning process and to anticipate the most appropriate step to take with the children. In this sense the documentation can be seen to represent an assessment of the child's learning while also providing opportunities for self-assessment as children revisit their experiences. As the teacher revisits the documentation again and again they gain a closer understanding of the child's capabilities and possibilities. It is a fundamental belief of the Reggio teachers that through documentation they are able to evaluate – or *give value* – not simply to what the child *can* do but what the child *could* do given the correct opportunity.

Progettazione therefore cannot be equated with a set curriculum of any sort as learning does not develop in a linear manner and cannot be organised into complete 'units'. Rather, by building a trusting relationship with the child and accompanying and guiding them on the path of their learning, by documenting their learning processes and giving value to all the child's possibilities, the teacher creates a reciprocal relationship of learning and teaching.

> *Progettazione is a metaphorical dance between teacher and child – a spiral of knowledge.*
>
> Carlina Rinaldi[11]

[9] Rinaldi, C., 'The Pedagogy of Listening', lecture given during American Study Tour, Reggio Emilia, May 1998.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.

Community and Parent–School Relationships

> *I've learned a lot of things from the infant–toddler centre and pre-school my grandson has attended. They have made me feel alive because I have had to reflect on those values that have always characterised my life ... I feel the need to grow with my grandson and this has given me a new outlook on life.*
>
> Luciano Gozzi, grandparent[1]

Reggio educators have described their philosophy of education as a 'pedagogy of relationships' as it is founded on the central importance of participation and interaction at every level: both within the school (between children, and between children and adults) and also between the school and the community. Indeed, there is a particularly strong relationship between school, family and community in Reggio Emilia. The importance of *participation* is highlighted by the Charter of Rights, which includes a section on the Rights of parents, and states,

> *It is the right of parents to participate actively, and with voluntary adherence to the basic principles, in the growth, care and development of their children who are entrusted to the public institution.*[2]

There are cultural aspects that render the idea of participation particularly workable in this part of Italy. Collectivity and cooperation remain important elements of Reggio Emilia and the Emilia–Romagna area of Italy in general. This is highlighted in economic terms by the continued presence of economically viable agricultural and industrial cooperatives, in political terms by the continued significant support for the Communist Parties and socially by the presence of a strong 'group culture'. Reggio's squares are often filled with men standing, talking in groups while women shop in the market, and young people go out normally in large groups. Indeed, the existence of the very many town squares throughout the town is testimony to the importance of a meeting place, a place where discussion takes place and ideas are exchanged. Discussion is very much part of the Italian way of life and what may be considered a full-blown argument in Britain may simply be a 'healthy discussion' in Italy. In many ways the evolution of the Municipal schools is a result of this culture that continues to consider the welfare of young children to be the collective responsibility of the community and in which conflict and differing points of view are seen to be essential aspects of learning.

The nurturing of parent–school relationships remains a key element of the Reggio Approach. There are pedagogical reasons for this, as Carlina Rinaldi explains:

> *... participation is an educational strategy that characterises our way of being and teaching. Participation of the children, the teachers and the families, not only by **taking part** in something but by **being** part of it, its essence, part of a common identity, a 'we' that we give life to through participation.*[3]

[1] Gozzi, L., in Fontanesi, G., 'Grandparents at the Infant–Toddler Centres and Pre-schools', *Rechild*, No. 2, April 1998.

[2] *A Journey through the Rights of Children: The Unheard Voice of Children* series, Reggio Children, 1996.

[3] Rinaldi, C., in Fontanesi, G., 'Grandparents at the Infant–Toddler Centres and Pre-schools', *Rechild*, No. 2, April 1998.

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The development of strong links between the home and school encourages:

- continuity in the children's lives
- the creation of a reciprocal network of communication
- participation by all involved (children, teachers, parents, community) in the life of the school
- feelings of 'ownership' by all involved.

How are parents and families involved?

Involvement of parents and families is encouraged at various levels.

- At an administrative level, parents are involved in the running of the schools through elected membership of school councils. All parents are encouraged to be involved in meetings held by the schools to discuss policy concerns and educational matters.
- At a practical level, there are many ways in which families are involved in the schools. They are asked to contribute to the upkeep of the buildings and gardens by volunteering to repair furniture, paint surfaces and equipment, make and build toys and equipment, tend to gardens and play areas, in short volunteer any particular experience they have. Their involvement is also encouraged through school outings and celebrations. Parties for particular family groups such as grandparents are often held to celebrate the importance and uniqueness of these relationships.
- The parents' relationship with the school begins even before the children have started school, through a comprehensive integration programme. This involves meetings between children, parents and teachers to build an image of the child as an individual, and often involves the child doing a task such as making a 'holiday booklet' of photographs and favourite nursery rhymes, etc., which can be used as stimulus for discussion between child and teacher. Integration takes place over a period of approximately one week and parent contact is gradually reduced so that the child gains confidence in the new environment. The integration period is considered extremely important, not only for the child but also for parents and teachers, as it is at this stage that a relationship of collaboration and trust is built. Parents can also be asked to become directly involved in the observation and documentation process of their child's learning if the school thinks it would be valuable to understand how the child acts in the home setting, so allowing teachers to build a more complete image of the child. The parent may be asked keep a journal for example, and take photographs that are then shared with teachers and with other parents in a group setting. Meetings to discuss children's learning experiences are frequent and tend to take place in a group setting reflecting Reggio educators' belief in the group dynamic.
- One of the most interesting aspects of the parent–school relationship in the Reggio schools is the role the schools play in adult learning through the organisation of regular talks and practical evenings where parents and families are given the opportunity to discuss various topics with experts in the field, such as child health, the role of religion in education and child diet. Parents have the opportunity to attend evenings run by the school cooks who explain and demonstrate how to prepare balanced meals for young children.

- Parents are also encouraged to take on the role of learner at research level. A good example of this is the year-long work completed by groups of parents from many schools on the theme of 'Questions facing Education'. The research culminated in a conference of the same name that took place in 1998. As part of the conference four parents presented papers on themes such as 'Can We Teach Without Feelings?' and 'Education and Time: Should We Fill the Day or Live It?' to a large and varied audience.

The reciprocal relationships that exist between child, family, school and indeed community are far reaching. To talk of a 'link' between school and home is to undervalue what actually takes place in Reggio. In reality it is not so much that families take part in the life of the school but rather that, together with the children and the teachers, *they are* the school.

Environment

> *A Reggio pre-school is a special kind of place, one in which young human beings are invited to grow in mind, in sensibility and in belonging to a broader community.*[1]
>
> Jerome S. Bruner[1]

The physical environment of the Reggio schools is one of the most well known aspects and perhaps also one of the most misunderstood. It is a common misconception that to 'do Reggio' entails whitewashing walls and introducing mirrors, three-dimensional pyramids and light tables into the nursery classroom. The reality is of course much more complex. We must ask why these things are done in order to understand the significance of the environment in pedagogical terms.

Participation and collectivity, key ideas that permeate all areas of the Reggio Approach, are of fundamental importance in considering the creation and use of the physical space of the school. Rather than separate spaces being used for separate purposes, the schools are composed of a series of connecting spaces that flow into one another. Rooms open onto a central piazza, mirroring the central meeting places in the town, and children move freely through the space. This type of openness is conducive to participation and interaction and to the general value of openness to the many differences that children, teachers and community bring with them to the schools – differences of race, religion, sex, language, culture.

Concurrent with the socio-constructivist model of learning that operates in the schools, the environment must be flexible and open to modification as the child protagonists progress along their learning paths. Furniture is designed to be multi-functional. Screens may be used to allow children to create shadow pictures and stories while at the same time serving as a divider of two spaces. Children are wonderful constructors and take delight in constructing and inhabiting new places. No Reggio school looks the same at the end of the year as it did at the beginning.

[1] Bruner, J., in Ceppi, G. and Zini, M. (eds), *Children, Spaces, Relations: Metaproject for an Environment for Young Children*, Reggio Children, 1998, p. 137.

The space must be conducive to research and autonomous discovery, both for individual children and for groups of children working together. An enormous amount of attention and effort goes into the design of furniture and organisation of space and materials to maximise the ease of use by the children. The youngest children sleep in cocoon-like open-ended beds that allow them to get in and out independently; art materials in the central and mini ateliers are in see-through containers so that children can easily find things on their own. Mirrors are used in a variety of ways. They hang from the ceiling over changing tables, can be found at floor level and form play apparatus in the form of pyramids that the children can enter to explore the images they become part of. Children therefore gain an understanding of themselves in relation to their surroundings, a belief that is central to the philosophy.

The importance of the aesthetic dimension for learning has already been explained. This is very much in evidence in the schools' physical make-up. These schools are multi-sensory environments, and materials can be displayed in many ways and for different reasons, encouraging children to look at shades and colours and consider how to use them, to consider textures and smells. These schools are not, however, painted in the bright primary colours that many adults misconceive to be favoured by children. Instead there is a pervasive feeling of light and space brought about by the use of light or white walls. The way in which children's artwork painted on transparent sheets creates interesting layering and diffused light, and the way in which movable walls and wall-size windows allow the interior to integrate with the outside environment. Perhaps again reflecting the centrality of the child and his relationship with the school, it is the children themselves who contribute colour through their clothing and belongings, their artwork and sculptures.

The outside environment also is an obvious source of colour and texture, and plants are widely used in the classrooms as well as in interior courtyards. This also serves to create a natural link between the inside and the outside environments of the school.

Fostering a link with the outside environment is important because a school as a place of learning and discovery cannot be seen to be an island. Rather, within the school children learn how to become full and active participators in the greater, outside environment. A school must nourish an understanding of what is happening 'on the outside'. Outside play areas and equipment are very much in evidence, occasionally forming a physical link between inside and out, perhaps in the form of canopies and verandas. Through the use of child-built installations such as the Amusement Park for Birds at the Villetta pre-school, the outside becomes a learning centre where children can learn about the elements and physical forces.

The physical environment of the schools is therefore much more than a simple container for learning and teaching. Rather, the environment can be seen to be a central component of the learning and teaching relationship. Indeed, it is easy to see why Reggio educators call the environment 'the third teacher'.

Teachers as Learners

> *Good staff development is not something that is undertaken every now and then, reflecting only on the words of someone else. Instead, it is a vital and daily aspect of our work, of our personal and professional identities. Staff development is seen above all as an indispensable vehicle by which to make stronger the quality of our interaction with children and among ourselves.*
>
> Carlina Rinaldi[16]

Although initial teacher training in Italy was meagre until 1998, with pre-school and elementary teachers needing only the minimum of qualifications, the Municipal education system in Reggio Emilia has long been recognised for its outstanding and exemplary approach to the professional development of teachers.

Continuing professional development is not about developing teachers' understanding of *how to teach* but about developing their understanding of *how children learn*. Teachers are encouraged to understand children's learning processes rather than acquire skills and knowledge that they will then expect children to learn. Research is a fundamental learning strategy for children in the Reggio schools and this is mirrored in the approach to professional development. Teachers are seen to be learners first and foremost.

Professional development in the Reggio Approach is quite different from normal practice in Scotland where it is generally consigned to planned activity time and days of in-service training. Professional development in Reggio is considered to be a continuing evolutionary process that is an intrinsic part of the teacher's day. At its heart is the belief in staff development as *change*; staff development as promoting *participation* and *interaction*.

Co-teachers are given ring-fenced time daily to discuss and evaluate the day's work, attempting to interpret the children's learning process but also evaluating their own role and working together to predict possible learning paths. A constant dialogue of opinion is created in the joint analysis and interpretation of documentation. The fact that two teachers work together with a group of children for three years means that a very close professional bond develops between co-teachers. It is a bond in which particular talents and strengths are shared and where new teachers have the opportunity to learn from more experienced colleagues.

Once a week, teachers are given time to come together as a group so that they can share their analyses and hypotheses with the rest of the staff including the school's *atelierista* and the *pedagogista* (a pedagogical advisor who works closely with teachers from a group of local schools). The key to these meetings is dialogue. As with the children they teach, conflict of ideas and opinions is considered to be not only a positive contributor to learning but also a fundamental factor. Project work is discussed and there is a continual exchange of reflections and of opinions. Teachers are given the

[16] Rinaldi, C., in Katz, L. and Cesarone, B. (eds), *Reflections on the Reggio Emilia Approach*, Edizioni Junior, 1994, pp. 47-50.

opportunity to use a variety of documentary media in communicating their work with colleagues.

Through the *pedagogista*, teachers have the opportunity to meet with colleagues from different schools within the town to share their experiences and discuss the learning that is taking place in their schools.

Professional development also takes other forms. Through close relationships with parents at individual, group and school meetings that seek to share the children's creative and learning processes, teachers become increasingly aware of the importance of listening and of considering differing viewpoints. Reggio educators also believe strongly that teachers must be individuals who, like the children they work with, are naturally curious about the world they live in and about learning generally. While much time is given to ensure that teachers have the opportunity to become competent in the various artistic activities that they wish to share with the children, the emphasis is not simply on the acquisition of skills but rather on encouraging teachers to think in different ways and to consider different viewpoints so that they might best respond to the children's spontaneous learning. Teachers are therefore given the opportunity to meet and talk with people living and working outside the boundaries of education such as scientists, musicians, writers, architects and poets.

As with other key aspects of the Reggio Approach, within its commitment to continuing professional development there are values of collegiality, interaction and participation. This is perhaps most evident in the absence of a hierarchical staff structure in the schools, the complete lack of externally imposed policies, manuals and curriculum guidelines, and the fact that goals for professional development are determined by the teachers themselves.

WHAT CAN THE SCOTTISH EARLY YEARS EDUCATION SYSTEM LEARN FROM THE REGGIO APPROACH?

Undoubtedly, there is much that we can learn from Reggio educators: in particular, true collaboration between all parties involved in the children's learning and in the life of the schools, detailed documentation of children's learning processes, the importance of the environment in learning, the unique way in which expressive arts are used as a stimulus for all areas of learning, excellent professional development. All of these deserve careful consideration in our early years classrooms.

However, while there is much we may wish to take on board, we need to be cautious in attempting to implement the Reggio Emilia Approach in our own early years settings. There is a sense in which the Reggio Approach is not directly transferable.

- The 'Reggio Approach' is not a teaching method that can easily be copied but rather an approach that varies from school to school according to the adults and children who give it identity. It is an approach that is not static but continues to grow and evolve.
- The values and beliefs intrinsic to the pedagogical approach are so much a part of the wider cultural context that is the town of Reggio Emilia and its people that to attempt somehow to drop the educational approach into a very different social and cultural setting would be damaging to the new culture's existing good practice and to the integrity of the Reggio Approach itself. There is a real sense that if these schools are part of the town then the town is also a fundamental part of the schools.

> *It is a mistake to take any approach and assume like a flower you can take it from one soil and put it in another one. That never works. We have to figure out what aspects of that are most important to us and what kind of soil we need to make those aspects grow.*
>
> Howard Gardner[17]

There are also practical issues that need careful consideration.

- The Reggio Approach has evolved gradually over a period of more than 40 years. We could not therefore hope to replicate their achievements immediately.
- Reggio educators are of the conviction that this pedagogical approach only works once all the various contributing factors are firmly in place. If this is true, it makes adoption a momentous task.
- The Reggio schools receive significant funding from local government, which allows them considerable power and autonomy. It also allows them to build purpose-built, state-of-the-art schools.
- Reggio's infant-toddler centres and pre-schools represent a network of mutual support and learning. As the Scottish system is a much more diverse mixture of local authority and private provision and of day care, nursery and play groups, a great amount of effort, work and funding would be needed to create and coordinate such a coherent network.

[17] Gardner, H., 'Complementary perspectives on Reggio Emilia' in Edwards, C., Gandini, L. and Forman, G. (eds), *The Hundred Languages of Children*, Ablex Publishing, 1993.

ADAPTATION OF A PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH

While direct replication of the Reggio Approach would be both difficult and ill advised, the approach can undoubtedly serve as a stimulus for much needed change within our own system. Without attempting to copy we can, in the words of Carlina Rinaldi, seek *to translate* what we learn from Reggio educators.

Reflecting on Current Practice

The first step that practitioners must take in translating any new educational philosophy or approach is to reflect on current practice. The Scottish CCC document *Teaching for Effective Learning* states that:

> *... reflecting on what we, as individuals truly want to achieve in our job is an important starting point for identifying personal and professional development needs.*[18]

We must also recognise the danger of throwing out what is good simply for the sake of new trends. Reflection should take place not only at practitioner level but also at policy-making level. Teachers bound by the constraints of standardised assessment policies and an ever-increasing number of externally imposed mandates will have difficulty in reflecting on personal practice.

Encouragingly, the British systems hold certain beliefs common to the Reggio Approach.

The Rumbold Report[19] made the following statements:

> *Children should take responsibility for their own learning.*
> *The process of learning is as important as the content and needs careful consideration in curriculum planning.*
> *Observation based assessment is vital in planning an appropriate curriculum for every child.*

Equally, the Scottish CCC document *A Curriculum Framework for Children 3-5* states the following:

> *Young children come to early years settings as active, experienced learners with a natural curiosity. They are unique individuals eager to make sense of their world, to develop relationships and to extend their skills. (p. 3)*
> *The Early Years setting should be a place where all of the children's senses are engaged and stimulated. (p. 31)*

[18] Scottish CCC, *Teaching for Effective Learning*, SOEID, 1997.

[19] Department of Education and Science, *Starting with Quality: The Rumbold Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Quality of the Educational Experience offered to 3- and 4-year olds*, HMSO, 1997.

> *To promote effective learning in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect adults need to be consistent and realistic in their expectations and their responses to children. Developing warm, supportive relationships with children and other adults creates a climate in which children feel confident to tackle new challenges and where children can see mistakes as part of the learning process (p. 44)*[20]

The report *Education of Children under Five in Scotland* states:

> *The first five years of a child's life encompass a complex period of rapid growth and development. The experiences that children have during these years profoundly influence their physical well-being, their sense of self-worth, their feelings about other people, their capacity to learn and their attitudes towards learning – all factors which will exert a powerful influence on their long-term development and, more immediately, on their future schooling.*[21]

The above quotations highlight the importance that Scottish policy gives to the child as an individual, to the centrality of the child in their own learning experience and to developmentally appropriate practice. Scottish educators are also becoming increasingly aware of the importance of documentation and evaluation as intrinsic parts of the learning experience and of the importance of positive relationships with parents. Clearly it is the extent to which these values and beliefs have been developed and the strong correlation between theory and practice in the Reggio schools that is so exemplary.

However, the final quotation highlights a fundamental difference between the two systems. Although in Scotland we have recognised the importance of early childhood as a key period in human development, and the importance of early years education, we are increasingly in danger of valuing early childhood and early years education principally as a stepping stone to formal education and to adulthood. We must reflect on why we need early years education and what we want it for.

- Are our early years education services there simply to prepare children for primary, secondary and tertiary education?
- Is early years education simply a way of ensuring that we furnish society with the necessary skills to provide social and economic stability?
- In short is early years education little more than an antechamber for something more important?

Good practice in Scotland, as in Reggio Emilia, emphasises the importance of early childhood as a period of phenomenal growth and rapid development but also as a unique period filled with joy and wonderment. It demonstrates that early years education is about stimulating learning and experience, about giving voice to the child and about celebrating early childhood as a highly important period in its own right.

[20] Scottish CCC, *A Curriculum Framework for Children 3–5*, The Scottish Office, 1999

[21] HM Inspectors of Schools, *Education of Children under Five in Scotland*, SOED, 1994

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Early childhood is the foundation on which children build the rest of their lives. But it is not just a preparation for adolescence and adulthood: it has an importance in itself.[22]

Carlina Rinaldi suggests that we reflect upon the following:

What do we hope for children?
What do we expect from children?
What is the relationship between school and research?
What is the relationship between school and education?
What is the relationship between school, family and society?
What is the relationship between school and life?
Is school a preparation for or a part of life?[23]

Teachers in the Municipal pre-schools are firmly committed to the provision of early years education as a fundamental right of every child. No research has been done into the effect of the Reggio Approach on children's subsequent learning experiences although anecdotal evidence from primary school teachers suggests that the children are particularly adept socially, verbally and artistically. However, to consider translating the Reggio Approach simply as some form of early intervention programme is to misunderstand and to do injustice to the values and beliefs underlying the approach.

The following issues integral to the Reggio Approach are of particular interest to the Scottish system:

- physical features
- time
- collaboration
- partnership with parents
- curriculum
- the role of the adult
- documentation
- initial teacher training and professional development.

While these issues should ideally be considered holistically and interdependently, certain issues may prove of particular interest to individuals schools and professionals. For this reason they are worth looking at individually although it should be noted that they are generally interrelated.

[22] Ball, C., *Start Right: The Importance of Early Learning*, Royal Society of Arts, 1994.

[23] Rinaldi, C., "The Image of the Child", lecture given at British Study Tour, Reggio Emilia, April 1999.

Physical Features

For many educators first faced with the challenges of the Reggio Approach the physical features of the school environment represent the most obvious point of reference. Some find the beauty of the physical environment, the amount of space, the state-of-the-art furnishings and the outside facilities inspiring, while others find them daunting and overwhelming, feeling that they are impossible to recreate. While we can learn much from the way in which the space is organised we must be careful not to exaggerate its importance. The inclusion of mirrors and specially produced furniture does not create the Reggio Approach. It is unlikely, in the short term at least, that we can expect local authorities to build new nursery schools with specially produced furniture, but we can learn much by reflecting on how space is used in the Reggio schools and why it is used in that way.

The use of space is linked to the commitment to the image of the child as a capable, resourceful being, and to the belief that all learning must start with the child. Once the adults involved move their focus from how to teach the child to being concerned with how the child learns, then the way in which space needs to be organised must also change. The teacher no longer considers how to use the space to enable her to teach but how the space can be used by all concerned to create valuable learning experiences. The focus therefore moves from the adult to the group.

In considering the organisation of our nurseries it might be helpful to consider Vea Vecchi's suggestions on how a school environment should be organised. [24]

The environment should:

- *encourage autonomous thought and encourage and maintain action*
- *encourage communication between children and also with adults*
- *enable relational exchanges in a variety of contexts and situations.* Children constantly search for new relationships with peers and adults. Children of different ages will use space differently to do so. The older children seek out the more secluded parts of the rooms and spaces.
- *create a variety of stimuli for the imagination.* Young children are particularly attracted to narrative, creating stories, becoming part of imaginary situations and copying real life through role-play. They need the freedom of space to do so. The simplest of objects can provide stimuli. The children's narratives are not confined to specific areas or corners. Given the opportunity, children create new, temporary environments autonomously. A piece of coloured cloth on the floor becomes a particular place; a beam of artificial light projected in a certain way defines the boundaries of a place. In this way children can create 'space within space'.
- *encourage a number of differing sensory experiences*
- *provide for privacy and quiet opportunities.* Children of all ages need space to rest and relax. They might choose a separate room that is dimly lit or they might choose to hide under a table or behind a curtain.

[24] Vecchi, V. 'What kind of place for living well in a school?' in Cagni, G. and Zini, M. (eds). *Children, Spaces, Relations: Metaproject for an Environment for Young Children*. Reggio Children: 1998, pp. 128–135.

If our educational philosophies and practice are to evolve through time then no one environment remains constantly suitable. For this reason, nursery schools built in Reggio continue to be adapted over time. While the Diana school has been given the accolade of one of the best schools in the world, it has changed significantly in the past thirty years. Remodelling has taken place, mini ateliers have been added within classrooms, spaces have been partitioned with glass walls and a central piazza created. These are all changes considered necessary after long consideration was made about how the children use the spaces they have.

As many Scottish nursery schools are housed in accommodation that is not purpose built it might be helpful to consider an example of one such school in Reggio Emilia: the Gianni Rodari Infant–Toddler Centre that is in the very heart of the town centre. This school is on the second floor of what was once an office block and now houses – along with the infant–toddler centre – the town's community-run family centre, the workshops of Mario Dolci (the puppeteer who works closely with the children in the Reggio pre-schools and toddler centres) and a number of artists' studios.

While the accommodation may be considered less desirable than a purpose-built centre, educators have given careful consideration to the space available, and changes have been made with outstanding results. A large window giving a wonderful vista over the town has blocked off a disused entrance and staircase. The staircase and entrance have therefore become a small stage and amphitheatre that the children use for a variety of purposes. Also, although being on the second floor of a building might normally restrict children from being able to run directly outside, this has been challenged by building an outside walkway that leads directly off one classroom and joins with another at the opposite end of the school. The centre of the walkway widens to form a large play area furnished with outdoor play equipment. This ingenious structure not only serves as the 'piazza' or meeting place that it was not possible to make inside the school, but also serves to create a feeling of circularity and continuity within the school as both ends of the building are linked together and with the outside.

Within the classrooms the space continues to be used imaginatively and with careful consideration. These classrooms are particularly spacious, highlighted by a combination of natural and artificial lighting. The children's beds are stored behind curtains and partitions that in turn become projection screens or part of a backdrop for children's constructions and shadow play. Storage boxes are arranged to provide seating in the assembly area. Rather than creating a specific hideaway as can be found in many of the schools, the teachers here, after careful consideration, have chosen not to do so, allowing children to find their own, perhaps more imaginative, places. The underside of work surfaces, curtains and corners all become hideaways for children who need some quiet time. The mirror pyramid that has become a symbol of Reggio schools might be a house, a bed or a boat. While the linear layout of the school prevents the inclusion of a central piazza, open doorways create a flowing environment and teachers work closely to ensure that children are given many opportunities to mix with children from other classrooms. Indeed, in schools such as the Rodari Centre where the teachers and children have had to think carefully about how to use space that does not necessarily fit easily with their educational approach, there is a sense in which the philosophy actually becomes more visible and a very special 'culture of inhabitance' and unique identity is created.

On entering the Reggio schools one of the most striking aspects is the obvious lack of clutter. While large amounts of space may be given over to children's large constructions there is very little in the way of commercial toys. Neither are these nurseries overly dressed with carpets and curtains. Instead importance is given to light and space.

Although specific corners familiar to British nurseries, such as the home corner, sand play area and water area, are present in the Reggio environment, they are not available on an everyday basis. In this respect alone we can learn much from Reggio educators. The danger in putting out the water tray every day is that we cease to reflect on why we do so.

Questions to reflect upon

- Do we place enough importance on the use of space in our curriculum organisation/planning?
- In making decisions about the use of space to what extent do we take account of how the children naturally use the space?
- Is the adult's use of space also taken into consideration?
- How can the organisation of space help to create a genuine living and working environment for which the child feels responsible?

Time

In many ways, for those considering the adaptation of all areas of the Reggio Approach one of the most important issues for consideration is time. We must consider how we make use of time in practical terms but we must also give consideration to time in philosophical terms.

Time, and how children and adults use it, is central to the Reggio philosophy. The rhythm and pace of the child is always given overriding importance. It is given enormous value. In the words of a parent of a Reggio child, we must

> *... take possession of time as a value, not only as a means or an end. [We must] find and give back meaning to time.*
>
> Reggio Parent[25]

- This means recognising that children's rhythms differ from those of adults.
- This means understanding that learning takes place when the adult–child relationship is not constrained by adult-imposed time restrictions.
- This means really having time for children's thoughts and ideas, and giving value to their work, their conversations and their feelings by slowing down to listen to them.
- This means making the learning relationship between children and between adults and children the priority by constantly reflecting on our experiences with them.

> *In other words in daily educational practice we tend to give importance to a way of life that leans more towards slowness, by that we mean towards reflection and observation.*[26]

[25] Bertolini, A., 'L'Educazione e il Tempo: Tempi della Famiglia e Tempi dei Bambini. Riempire la Giornata o Viverla?', lecture given at Conference entitled 'Le Domande dell'Educare Oggi', Reggio Emilia, May 1998.

[26] *Ibid.*

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- This means giving value to the various moments of the school day not given to planned activity time. We must be careful not to fill the children's day and to recognise the importance of moments of reflection, rest, and being together in children's lives.

> *Not only play and educational experience form the connective tissues of these schools, but also the pauses: eating together, sleeping at school, having moments and space for being able to be apart from all the others as well as for staying together with all the other children.*[27]

Obviously the practical implications in introducing a more reflective way of learning and teaching are many.

- We can concentrate on quality rather than quantity. Children need not experience a large number of different educational experiences in one day but rather should be given the scope to develop learning experiences. The Curriculum Framework is helpful in this aspect stating that 'Planning should be flexible so that it can take account of children's ideas and responses to learning experiences and allow learning to develop spontaneously.'[28]
- Working with children in small groups means reconsidering how adults divide their time both between children and with other staff. It can be legitimate for one adult to work with a small group while other adults work with the rest. Does equal sharing mean that we always need to divide numbers equally? Scottish early years settings generally have a more favourable staff-child ratio than Reggio schools, which allows for small group work if teachers' time is carefully considered.
- *Progettazione*, which encourages children to learn through shared discovery and through revisiting experiences, necessitates a great deal of unrestricted time. How can that fit with a more structured curriculum set-up?
- Detailed documentation obviously necessitates time that is not spent in direct teaching. It might be pertinent to reconsider how staff is organised and how adults can best divide their time so that more time can be made for documentation. Different types of documentation would need to be considered. There is a sense in which a photograph can record much more than time-consuming note taking. It is also important to remember that only the most valuable learning experiences should be documented, not everything that moves!
- If effective continuing professional development is to be valued, then more time for this purpose is fundamental. Reggio teachers have an average of six hours non-contact time a week for this purpose. This has obvious implications for policy makers, for staffing and school budgets.

Questions to reflect upon

- How do we take account of how children learn in curriculum planning?
- Is there a flexible approach to the curriculum that allows children the time to pursue particular interests?
- Should practitioners be re-thinking the 'how' of their interactions with children?

[27] Bertolini, A., 'L'Educazione e il Tempo: Tempi della Famiglia e Tempi dei Bambini. Riempire la Giornata o Viverla?', lecture given at Conference entitled 'Le Domande dell'Educare Oggi', Reggio Emilia, May 1998.

[28] Scottish CCC, 'A Curriculum Framework for Children 3-5', The Scottish Office, 1999, p. 34.

- In organising the daily routine should the approach to working with children be more about their needs and interests than about an adherence to working with set numbers?
- Are our early childhood settings too busy?
- Is adequate consideration given during the curriculum planning process to the time that children require to be reflective about their own learning?
- Can time be organised in ways that increase adults' opportunities to be more reflective about the children and their own practice?

Collaboration

The belief in collaboration, collegiality and relationships pervades the Reggio educational philosophy. Much of this is an extension of a much larger cultural context that deserves careful consideration. Indeed, the idea of schools functioning successfully without any inherent hierarchical management structure is so foreign to our highly structured society that it is almost unimaginable. However, true collaboration between teachers and between school and society is undoubtedly a way of thinking that represents a very positive example to other communities and is one that it would be wise to act upon.

- We must beware of simple coordination rather than real collaboration. The organisation and clear division of work is not the same as true collaboration that involves listening to others, considering varying points of view, helping one another for the good of the school as community.
- We must recognise and give value to the varying and particular strengths of different workers within the hierarchical structure of our schools. Nursery nurses have expressed trepidation over implementing some of the Curriculum Framework and yet are generally highly experienced professionals whose skills complement those of the nursery teacher.
- We must make increased opportunities for the exchange of ideas between early childhood professionals since there can be a tendency for people working in this sector, as in any other, to become isolated and absorbed in their own practices and routines. Hearing the ideas and opinions of other colleagues in a spirit of 'learning together' informs everybody's practice and can be a rich and stimulating resource from which practitioners can draw great strength and support.
- Focusing on the children's learning experiences and how they can be best developed rather than on the teacher's teaching makes it easier to cope with criticism and to avoid defensive reaction to suggestions and change. The Curriculum Framework recognises the importance of discussing observations with other members of staff. By setting aside time each day or week for formal and informal discussion we give increased value both to the children's learning and to the work done by the professionals involved. We also increase opportunities to learn from one another.

Questions to reflect upon

- Do we place enough importance on making opportunities to meet with other colleagues?
- Could staff development options be considered more in terms of staff sharing best practice ideas than the more conventional course model?

- The mixed economy of qualifications within early childhood settings can result in some staff being more valued then others. How are we attempting to address this issue within our own setting(s)?
- Will a national framework of qualifications help the early years sector in this regard?
- Is the usual staff meeting the most appropriate forum for cooperative discussion and action?

Partnership with Parents

The importance of the parents' role in early childhood education has been given increasing recognition in Scotland in recent years. Many schools now encourage parents to become involved in school life in a variety of ways including fund raising, accompanying children on school trips and through increased formal dialogue with teaching staff about children's academic progress.

Unlike Reggio, parents are also encouraged in certain schools to become involved in the classrooms, working directly with the children. Reggio educators are firm in their conviction that casual parental involvement in the classroom can upset routines and disturb children's learning. Nevertheless, this remains a very positive aspect of the Scottish school set-up and may be something that Reggio educators could learn from us.

The relationship that exists between school and parents in Reggio is certainly very special and has some serious implications for the Scottish system.

- An equal trusting relationship between parents and teachers cannot be forced. It takes time and effort on both parts to create. Partnership involves mutual involvement and mutual respect.
- By increasing the information parents are given daily we encourage parents to ask sensitive questions in discussion about the day's events both with parents and children. It is difficult for parents to become involved if they are unsure of what is going on! In the cloakroom area of many Reggio schools can be generally found a basic outline of the week's projected activities, a written account of the day's completed activities that often includes quotations of children's remarks and examples of the artwork produced by the children along with photographs. There is also a detailed written account of the ongoing project. Alongside this information can be found advertisements and publicity for pertinent social and cultural activities taking place in town, which might be of interest to parents and children.
- Personal contact remains fundamental to the creation of true partnership. Staff can take time to greet each child and their parent as they arrive in school each morning. This is easiest in the early years setting particularly as the arrival time may be staggered. It may prove more problematic in the primary setting where even the youngest children may arrive alone by public transport.
- Teachers often remark that parents are reluctant to become involved in Scottish schools. While there are undoubtedly cultural reasons for this schools can do much to encourage involvement. However, work currently being undertaken with parents in Scotland is showing that consulting parents about their needs and interests is helping staff to design appropriate workshops and discussions that parents are

attending. Another very supportive feature has been the provision of crèches, which allows parents to attend, who would otherwise have child care difficulties. Consideration could also be given to developing a new style of parents' evening that does not rely on parent interviews only as the main method of communication with parents about their child/children.

- Where people have a great deal of pride in something they become increasingly willing to be involved. In a sense the easiest way to encourage parents' interest in school life is to make it more interesting. Children who talk enthusiastically about the day's activities encourage parents to ask interesting questions. A parent faced with photographs of their child deeply involved in the creation of an interesting piece of artwork will want to discuss it with their child, look at the work and talk with the teacher.
- By recognising that parents are able to contribute to the school services as well as receive the services they desire, teachers give value to the role of the parent in their children's learning and often will find that parents are very willing to be involved. The involvement of non-Italian parents in the collation of a book of international nursery rhymes in one of the Reggio schools is one such example of the small ways in which parents can share their differing experiences with the school.

Questions to reflect upon

- How is day-to-day contact made with families?
- How are families encouraged to contribute to the life of the school?
- In organised activities are parents encouraged to take a lead or are they simply expected to attend?
- What means can we use to encourage contact and create relationships with parents who are unable to make frequent visits to the school?
- Is partnership the model we should be aiming for in establishing relationships with parents?

Curriculum

Non-Italian educators faced with the Reggio Approach are often wary of *progettazione*, as it seems to be simply a return to the child-led philosophies popular in the past and because they feel increasingly constrained by the need to implement an ever-fuller curriculum. However, the following points should be noted.

- It is important to remember that the Reggio Approach is not a philosophy that centres completely on the child. It is one that takes into consideration the needs of both adults and children involved in the reciprocal learning relationship. Indeed, rather than talking of a child-centred or an emergent relationship, it is perhaps more suitable to talk of it being 'child originated and teacher framed'.[2]

[2] Forman, G. and Fyfe, B. 'Negotiated Learning Through Design, Documentation and Discourse' in Edwards, C., Gandini L. and Forman, G. (eds), *The Hundred Languages of Children*, 2nd edn, Ablex Publishing, 1998, pp. 239–260.

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- The Scottish system is not bound by a National Curriculum that puts heavy constraints on what or how children learn. Rather, the Scottish Curriculum Guidelines are based on four guiding principles:[10]
  - The best interests of children
  - The central importance of relationships
  - The need for all children to be included
  - An understanding of the ways in which children learn.
- The Curriculum Framework for Children 3–5 represents flexible guidelines that emphasise children's central role in their own learning and describes the curriculum as 'planned experiences based on different aspects of children's development and learning'. In this sense it is close to the Reggio philosophy, as it is not designed to be a rigid checklist of learning outcomes.
- Like the Reggio Approach, the Curriculum Framework emphasises the key importance of fostering positive relationships and of emotional, personal and social development generally.

Questions to reflect on

- How do we take account of the four guiding principles in planning and supporting children's learning?
- In planning for a broad and balanced approach to the curriculum how do we take account of depth?
- Do we allow children time to engage fully with their topic or line of enquiry?
- How can we create a context in which children's interests and curiosities are listened to and legitimised?

The Role of the Adult

The role of the adult in the Reggio Approach to children's learning is crucial. In a sense it represents the greatest challenge to Scottish teachers. If the adult's main role is that of facilitator then he must seek to provide a climate of encouragement for the children who are given the opportunity to make hypotheses and take risks on their learning paths. This does not mean giving children complete freedom but rather creating an ordered environment in which children are free to explore.

Consideration needs to be given to the following.

- Children will create their most interesting and imaginative work when they have a wide and varied choice of material and resources at hand. It is the teacher's role to provide these in a discerning manner and to organise and display them in a manner that is both functional and attractive to the child. The types of suitable materials are limitless – shells, beads, stones, pulses, seeds, clay, paper, cardboard, wood, etc., all have tremendous possibilities for pictorial work and construction work. Giving children the opportunity to select material encourages more interesting and individual work.

[10] Scottish CCC, *A Curriculum Framework for Children 3–5*, The Scottish Office, 1999.

- It is not simply a case of laying everything out in front of children and giving them free reign. Teachers should make discerning choices about appropriate materials and learning activities. It is not necessary, for example, for children to use the sandbox or the water tray every day.
- Children who become involved in a learning activity should be given the opportunity to continue with it for as long as they need. Teachers need to find ways of making space for work in progress rather than simply telling children to clear up at the end of the day.
- It takes time to build confidence in our own capacity to give children the lead in their learning experience and this aspect of the Reggio Approach may prove problematic for teachers used to directing learning activities. Clearly this has implications for initial teacher training, continuing professional development and in-service training.
- Part of the philosophy that is *progettazione* is the belief that being confused is a fundamental part of the learning process. Teachers therefore may choose, when they feel it is appropriate, to allow children to go down the wrong path and to let them make 'mistakes' without intervening. Some educators find this to be an unnecessarily lengthy process and others feel it may even be unfair to the children. We must reflect upon how such ideas correspond with our own way of thinking.
- The Reggio experience suggests that very young children are able to remain engaged in projects for a much longer period of time and at a deeper level than is generally recognised. The level of graphic work produced by these children suggests that they are more able than often realised to represent their ideas, projections and emotions in this manner. This would suggest that we are seriously underestimating our children.
- We must maintain high expectations for children's learning and find ways of demonstrating to them that we take their work seriously. There are strong links between adult expectations and children's aspirations and performance. Children very quickly sense what adults hold to be of real importance. Talking *with* children rather than *to* them about their work is fundamental. In the nursery setting in particular, although sending finished artwork home is undoubtedly an important way of encouraging a link between school and home environments, it is not always appropriate. By retaining work in school and using it with the children to revisit learning experiences we demonstrate that we put importance on their work as well as their thoughts and feelings.
- Those working in early years settings in Scotland, for the most part, are unable to count on the expertise of an *atelierista*. If the expressive arts are to play a more central role in all of children's learning experiences then clearly teachers must be given the opportunity to gain experience and confidence in using the various media they wish to use with children. This can be made possible through regular practical workshops, genuine teamwork within schools where teachers can share particular skills with colleagues and also by inviting specialists into schools to work both with teachers and children. (An interesting example of the successful cooperation between teachers, children and specialist is the work done by the organisations Highlands & Islands Arts Ltd (HI-ARTS) and Children in Scotland in collaboration with play groups in the Highland Region.)

Questions to reflect upon

- What expectations do we have for the children in our settings?
- Children are capable people. Does our approach to them reflect this?
- How would you define the adult's role in relation to the children's learning?

- To what extent do children play a lead role in their own learning?
- How effectively are the adults engaging with the children both as companions and as fellow learners?

Documentation

Scottish teachers are generally aware of the importance of recording children's progress using a variety of means for all areas of the curriculum. The collation and organisation of individual pupil profiles is one such example. In Reggio, the documentation of children's learning is undoubtedly one of the most outstanding features of the approach. How therefore can the Reggio experience help us build on existing good practice?

- It is important to remember that recording and documenting children's finished products is not necessarily the most helpful way to understand children. We must seek to document the children's cognitive learning processes.
- Documentation is only useful to children, teachers and parents if it is constantly revisited and time is given to reflection and discussion of it.
- Documenting is much more than showing and displaying children's work on the wall. It must create a greater understanding of children's learning and of the experiences of all involved. Documentation should add something to the learning experience and inform planning for future learning.
- Documentation is not used to provide assessment of a comparative type. Teachers need not attempt to document the same experiences for every child. This would of course be impossible. Documentation can be used to communicate to others the experience of the children as a collective unit. Although a photograph shows one child involved in a particular activity it can often be assumed that other children have had the same experience.
- Documentation is not simply about recording and assessment. It is also a very important learning tool. Children in both the nursery schools and the infant centres in Reggio regularly watch slides of themselves showing them involved in their daily activities as a way of revisiting their experiences, stimulating conversations and creating relationships.

Questions to reflect upon

- What methods are currently used to document children's progress in learning?
- How effectively do they document the process of learning?
- How can current records of learning be used with children to stimulate learning?
- How effectively do current records communicate children's experiences and learning processes to parents?
- Do children and parents contribute to the documentation process?

Initial Teacher Training and Professional Development

The Reggio Approach to learning has been described as 'child originated and teacher framed'. Although such an approach is not entirely in conflict with the underlying principles inherent in our own early childhood settings in Scotland, its overall successful

adaptation will rely on the development of a highly skilled and experienced early years workforce. This can only be achieved through initial vocational and teacher education undergraduate courses that are part of a coherent national framework, and subsequent professional development programmes that embody this approach.

Initial vocational and teaching training courses

- Traditionally, initial qualifications have given too little time to the preparation of early years educators and, it can be argued, have reflected the lack of value given to work in the nursery environment. Initial vocational and teacher training courses are, however, currently being reviewed particularly in terms of their relevance to early years education. An argument can indeed be made for the creation of a new group of awards that would aim to raise the status of early years professionals and create a highly skilled workforce.
- Considering the existing dynamic, early years climate, and taking into account the increasing diversity and range of early childhood provision, the Reggio Approach must be seen to be an important factor in the creation of new early childhood courses and in determining their content. The key factors inherent in the approach will have a direct impact on how practitioners engage in the learning process with children in the 0–5 year group.

Professional Development Programmes

In recent years in Scotland, we have witnessed a growing commitment to the importance of professional development programmes in the development and maintenance of quality early childhood provision. Such programmes are more widely available due to increased funding from central Government who now acknowledge the critical role they have to play both in supporting practitioners in their roles as early childhood educators and in the rapid expansion of the early childhood service.

- This service and these programmes that support it are undergoing dramatic change and review. The time is therefore opportune for the inclusion of features of the Reggio Approach in continuing professional development that would extend current thinking and practice. If practitioners are to be encouraged to become reflective learners and teachers, this must involve considering not only how features such as documentation and *progettazione* might be developed, but also possible ways in which planned time might be increased for staff to confer and collaborate daily about individual children and shared practice issues.
- The programme of continuing professional development in Reggio Emilia is exemplary in its encouragement of partnership and cooperation, not simply between colleagues but between schools. The range of early years services in Scotland is more diverse making it potentially more difficult to allow all educators to engage in professional development. However, both the voluntary and the private sectors will be given increased access to professional development through the support for Quality Assurance that will be offered to them as they enter into partnership agreement with local authorities.

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